

Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy*: A Realistic Picture of American Jewish Immigrants

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Abstract

This present study focuses on the desire of the Jews to acculturate and acclimatize themselves to American society. The movement from rural to urban America is a new experience for the immigrants they have no traditional community to depend upon there. The old/new world conflicts reflect several differences that make American Jewish literature unique. In her works, Ozick reflects the change of religious customs, the relationship in Judaism between reform and the conservative branches as well as the relationship to Christianity and other minority religions. Jews divorce themselves from the meaningful practice of Judaism, the predominant themes in Ozick's writing are the conflict between Hebraism and Hellenism, between past and present between artistic imagination and moral responsibility between Jews and the Gentiles. In *The Cannibal Galaxy* the protagonist Joseph Brill aspires for freedom from tradition of any kind thereby retaining a superficial connection with both his national and his spiritual identities.

KEYWORDS: realistic, immigrants, history, ethnic

The history of the Jew in America is the history of an idea. It is the story of how Jewish history was transformed by the idea of America and how, in turn Jewish writers, intellectuals, artists and public figures helped to sustain and modernize this idea (Girgus 3). While the American idea altered the modern Jewish experience, Jewish thinkers often led in the effort to make the idea of America relevant to the needs of an urban industrial and Post-industrial age. The work of such writers and thinkers serves to keep "the American idea meaningful in the time of competing authoritarian and totalitarian ideologies" (3).

Jewishness is a programme for life in America. The idea that the Jews in America could continue as a group defined not primarily by religion but by secular culture and quasi-national feeling, is often recognized as impossible by many writers. Judaism in all its branches flourished in America but the two great events in modern Jewish history, the murder of six million Jews by Hitler and inner life of American Jewry. The ethnocentric America' made cultural pluralism a programme for Jewishness in America. Judaism provided the strength and stability to the Jewish way of life thereby culture and religion got more intricately entangled" (Nathan 102). Glazer Nathan opines but the effect of Judaism is to resist the assimilation of the American Jew; but they live in a society that expects to see their ethnic particularity ultimately abandoned. Jewishness is the essence of Judaism but the separation of Judaism and Jewishness is the essence of Judaism but the separation of Judaism and Jewishness has accentuated as religion and life got

divorced (102). The notion that religion is important for Jewish self-respect is a kind of adjunct to the defence agencies engaged in fighting anti-semitism (129). Nathan states, however, that Judaism is not prepared for the abandonment of its roots and origins. Judaism is the binding force which holds the Jews together as a civilization.

American Jewish writers have focused on the intercultural encounter of the Jew and the American. They represent the history thoughts, feelings and experience of Jewish immigrants over the past two hundred years. Most of the Jewish American writers investigate the life situations of their protagonists, living in America who in a state of cross cultural shock go through the crisis like assimilation, dislocation, exile loss of identity, clashes of language, marginality and even victimization. This paper is an attempt to analyse the real picture of American Jewish Immigrants in Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy*.

Cynthia Ozick, Hortense Calisher, Grace Paley, Tilli Olsen are the foremost Jewish women writers who creatively try to relate to the Jewish tradition and their fiction adequately testifies it. These new Jewish American writers are different in many ways from the preceding generation of Jewish novelists with the emergence of Cynthia Ozick one can recognize a new unfolding on the horizon of the American Jewish writings. Ozick focuses on the Jews in America and on maintaining the Jewish religious and cultural traditions. For her "redemption is racial and religious" it lies in Jewish conscience Jewish history, Jewish magic and the Hebrew language" (Lyons 123) Ozick has emerged strangely as a committed Jewish writer.

Cynthia Ozick focuses on the desire of the Jews to acculturate and acclimatize themselves to American society. The movement from rural to urban America is a new experience for the immigrants they have no traditional community to depend upon there. The old/new world conflicts reflect several differences that make American Jewish literature unique. In her works, Ozick reflects the change of religious customs, the relationship in Judaism between reform and the conservative branches as well as the relationship to Christianity and other minority religions. Jews divorce themselves from the meaningful practice of Judaism, the predominant themes in Ozick's writing are the conflict between Hebraism and Hellenism, between past and present between artistic imagination and moral responsibility between Jews and the Gentiles. In *The Cannibal Galaxy* the protagonist Joseph Brill aspires for freedom from tradition of any kind thereby retaining a superficial connection with both his national and his spiritual identities. To Ozick the very nature of Brill's impulse towards an inclusive 'duality' is a movement away from Judaism.

Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy* portrays a real picture of the social and cultural aspects of the lives of the immigrant Jews. The story of *The Cannibal Galaxy* comes from a particularly American institution in Jewish life, the day school. The protagonist, Principal Brill is caught between two worlds, his native Parisian Jewish ghetto where he studied the centuries – old traditions of his ancestors and modern day Paris complete with arguably the world's best museum, the Louvre and the world renowned university the Sorbonne. In order to fulfil his destiny, Brill founds an American school based upon what he considers to be his unique inspiration, a dual curriculum. He theorizes that the combined method of learning will bridge the gap between the secular and the Jewish

thereby improving teaching methodologies. Through the plot of *The Cannibal Galaxy* Ozick tries to bring out the struggle against Judaism devoured by the modern world.

The Cannibal Galaxy reveals that its characters are taken from daily Jewish life. Its subjects are of serious, problematic representation. Moreover each of the main characters in profound "fraught with background" a background that has a secret second meaning that calls for interpretation. It is clear that *The Cannibal Galaxy* has turned to literal representation and imitation of American Jewish reality.

Ozick in the novel probes around from the inside like a surgeon. The result is an anatomy lesson on about an important "community" in Jewish American life. In *The Cannibal Galaxy* both Joseph Brill, the day school principal and Hester Lilt, the writer who enrolls her little daughter at the school for the regulation eight years of elementary education are so heavily weighted with background. From very beginning Joseph as a Jew has torn between two worlds, between two cultures; Jewish life represented by his rabbi and family and western civilization represented by Madame de Savigne.

The novel also reveals itself to be Brill's obsessive efforts to decode both art and reality. Brill finds a statue of Rachel in the museum and he thinks it is a statue of Rachel the Jewish matriarch, in learns later in an illuminating discovery it is of another Jewess the 19th French tragedienne Rachel who in her interpretation of neo-classical French culture brought it back to life for the French. Thus Ozick engages Jewish themes with misinterpretation and discovery.

The Holocaust plays a main role in Ozick's fiction. Though the horrific incidents did not take place on American soil, it affects the families of victims, the survivors who immigrated to America after the war. In the twentieth century, the trauma of the Holocaust forced a Jew to call into question not only the meaning of history but also the trust they place in God. In *The Cannibal Galaxy* Brill's fascination with pagan/Christian Museum carnival shows his desire for French (Hellenic culture). By proposing a Dual curriculum Brill wants to escape from his Jewish identity.

Ozick sees not the isolated self but self as a product of its civilization. In her writing the character embodies "The authentication powers of facts and power of fiction like a historian she judges deeds and their consequences (239) she draws on the rich texts to celebrate the continuity of Judaic civilization, to her art and history are linked and who so ever neglects history can never be successful. In *The Cannibal Galaxy* the triumph of Edmond Fleg's most acclaimed graduate Beilah Lilt, exposes the Dual curriculum of Joseph Brill as a sham and forces its dreamy proponent to conform to the emptiness of his ambitions.

Cynthia Ozick is a philosophical writer who takes Judaism more seriously than did the first generation of post world war second Jewish writers in America. She infuses her narratives with the values of Judaism and stresses on the celebration of Jewishness in everyday life on the whole Ozick combines the realistic and the surrealistic, comedy tragedy and philosophy in order to create beautifully rich texts exploring Jewish in America.

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